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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER) AND INR/B

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SUBJECT: NEW PSUV GOVERNORS REFLECT PREFERENCE FOR LOYALTY
OVER SKILL

REF: CARACAS 1635

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Most of the new PSUV governors have served previously in local or national political office, and many of them have longstanding ties to Chavez personally or left-wing credentials. The incoming governors from Anzoategui, Barinas, Guarico, and Trujillo States are tried and true Chavistas who are likely prized more for their loyalty to the President than their competence in office. This cable is the second in a series examining the background of the governors elected in the November 23 state and local elections. End Summary.

ANZOATEGUI - TAREK WILLIAM SAAB

¶2. (C) Tarek William Saab earned 55 percent of the vote to secure a second term as Governor of Anzoategui. Called "the most fervent militant of the revolution" by the opposition press, Saab appears to take pride in being perceived as ideologically radical. Among the GBRV's more outspoken critics of the United States, Saab was involved in Chavez's 1992 coup attempt and was denied a US non-immigrant visa in ¶1997. After violating the terms of a visa waiver he received in 2000 for an official visit to Washington, he had the National Assembly issue a decree exhorting the USG to review his visa renewal request. Saab has boasted that Venezuela was the first country to overcome a CIA plot.

¶3. (SBU) Saab studied at the private Santa Maria University and the public Central University of Venezuela (UCV), both in Caracas, where he specialized in criminal and human rights law respectively. While at UCV, Saab belonged to Movimiento 80, a student activist group that opposed traditional political parties. Saab served in the National Assembly as president of the Foreign Policy Committee (2000-2004). He is known as "the poet of the revolution" and has published at least eight books. Of Lebanese Druse descent, Saab was born in El Tigre, Anzoategui in 1963. He is married and has three children -- Yibram, Sofia, and Juan Simon.

BARINAS - ADAN CHAVEZ

¶4. (C) Adan Chavez is President's Chavez's older brother and is succeeding his father, Hugo de los Reyes Chavez, who was ineligible to run after serving twice as governor (2000-08).

The PSUV machine worked overtime in Barinas to overcome public distrust of the Chavez family and the perceived illegal enrichment of the family as a result of public office. Previously, Adan served as Minister of Education (2007-2008), Ambassador to Cuba (2004-2006), and the President's chief of staff (2003). He was also a member of the 1999 constituent assembly that redrafted the constitution. An engineer by training, Chavez taught physics at the University of the Plains. Adan has a close relationship with his brother and although more ideologically left-wing than the President, he is widely perceived to be one of the very few officials with some degree of influence over Chavez. He was born in 1953 and is the eldest of six brothers.

GUARICO - WILLIAN LARA

¶5. (SBU) Willian Rafael Lara, a former professor, served as Minister of Communication from 2006 to January 2008. He was first elected to the National Assembly in 1999 and served as its president from 2000 to 2002. Lara also served as National Director of the Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), the socialist party founded by Chavez that was later merged into the President's successor party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). He earned a communications degree from the Central University of Venezuela and a master's degree in political science from Simon Bolivar University. According to pro-opposition local media, Lara is perceived as an "upstart" and a poor leader. As of January 2008, Lara was single.

TRUJILLO - HUGO CABEZAS

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¶6. (SBU) Hugo Cabezas Bracamonte began his political career as a student activist at the public University of the Andes in the late 1980s. He was a founding member of the student group Utopia, which has been linked with the left-wing Bolivarian guerrilla group, the Bolivarian Liberation Front (FBL). Cabezas served as director of the Office of Identification and Alien Affairs (ONIDEX) from 2003 to at least 2005, where he oversaw the GBRV's drive to issue national identification cards. He also has served as the Secretary General of Tachira State and worked closely with Chavez as the Minister of the Presidency for several months (January to November 2007). Cabezas was born in 1972.

¶7. (C) Comment: Chavez's picks for PSUV gubernatorial candidates reflect a preference for personal loyalty over administrative competence. Adan Chavez in particular has been used in the past by Chavez as a stop-gap for symbolic posts -- such as the Ambassadorship to Cuba -- despite Adan's lack of charisma or managerial expertise. His reputation for bland leadership will likely fuel frustration in Barinas State, Chavez's birthplace, over criticisms of nepotism and corruption among the Chavez clan. End Comment.
CAULFIELD